In April Once

William Alexander Percy

because we have shared
our dreams, - and I love you
Frances -

Northampton, Mass
August 1926.

IN APRIL ONCE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR:

SAPPHO IN LEVKAS AND OTHER POEMS

ENZIO'S KINGDOM

IN APRIL ONCE

BY

WILLIAM ALEXANDER PERCY

NEW HAVEN
YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS
LONDON · HUMPHREY MILFORD · OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
MDCCCCXXV

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

First published, June, 1920
Second printing, March, 1925

I wish to thank the editors of *The Bellman, The Bookman, The Boston Transcript, Contemporary Verse, The North American Review* and *Scribner's Magazine* for their permission to include in this volume the poems which have already appeared in those publications.

W. A. P.

TO
MY MOTHER AND MY FATHER

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PART I. SICILIANA

IN APRIL ONCE

Regretting that anything which bears his name should not be lovelier, but knowing that with him there would be no regret to find it here inscribed, I dedicate this poem of which we spoke so often to Major William Sinkler Manning. It was given him to die as only the best deserve, gloriously, in battle, leading his troops in the attack on Hill 378, November the sixth, 1918. Life, as we know it, lost a lover of all that was beautiful and right, and I, my dear friend.

CHARACTERS

David
Guido
Hugo
Serle de Lanlarazon
Felice
Guards

IN APRIL ONCE

The year 1220 A. D.; a castle near Florence. A court on top of one of the bastions. To the right, a crenelated parapet over which a glimpse is had of an April landscape—hills, poplars, deep yellow sunlight. Fifty feet below, unseen, runs the road between Florence and the north. At the back, the walls of the castle and a wide doorway leading into the interior.

During the action, late afternoon changes to sunset, sunset to twilight, and at the end it is almost dark.

As the scene opens, the sound of retreating horses' hoofs is heard. David is standing on the parapet watching. He is twenty-two, strongly built, blond, with blue, wide-set eyes and sullen, brooding expression, simply dressed, with coat of mail and sword. He whistles and Guido's head appears at a window.

Guido is of the same age, a trifle taller and more slender, very dark, beautiful, full of high spirits and humorous gusto. His dark eyes are vivid and changing. He is elegantly dressed as a courtier.

David throws him a rope with a rope ladder attached. Guido fastens it and descends to the court.

Guido (*as he descends*). Thou art the knightliest
jailer that ever stood
Betwixt light heart and the free world. Were I
The Emperor, thou shouldst be seneschal
Of my Sicilian Joyous Guard, instead
Of jailer and henchman to the Florentines.

There lie the fragrant spaces, the glistening air,
The very troubadour and gypsy time o' year;
And here am I, hindered and snared, mewed up,
Because, forsooth, I sing the Emperor's songs,
Set off his colors, bear his pleasantries
To some adorèd lady of Provence,
To which your gross and choleric Florentines
Attach significance and secret import.
Jailer, the very spring hath need of me,
And that sweet southward-wending road
Would fringe itself, I swear, with gayer tulips
Were I but lilting to its guidance south.
Couldn't you let me out, David?

David. No, I could not.

Guido. If I should wheedle you; if I should be
The very most delightfulest young squire
And love you as my heart's most boon companion?
Say, you slept and dreamed of good Saint Peter,
What harm, if, when you woke, your keys were gone,
By chance or miracle—or merely me?

David. Were you Lord Jesus I'd not let you out.

Guido. I do almost surmise, somehow, I'm still
This prison's darling guest, and like to be
A many a month. Jesu, what waste, what waste!

David. O can't you see? I must not let you go!
The Florentines to me are nothing,
But I made oath to serve them faithfully
And they believed me.

Guido. Indeed, I do see, David.
Why, if you should accede to my keen urgence,
I would not go . . .
At least, I think I would not go, perhaps.

David. But, truly, are you so unhappy here?
Guido. In prison! and not most wretched! . . .
How can you ask?
Yet now I come to think of it . . . David,
That is the loveliest window in my cell!
Sometimes, when the sky is blurry yellow,
Just before dawn, you know,
You'd think there were a thousand birds outside;
And in my bed I lie, all shimmery,
Thinking delicious things
I never can remember afterwards.
And when, at last, I'm up and washed and wake,
There is the tender sunlight in long sweeps,
And the rose-colored hills, and the youthful poplars,
And the first green, so faint
You fear to look at it right steadily
Lest it should mist and melt away.
It's splendid, David.
But—now I know why I am miserable!
Think of the things I miss cooped up in here.
Adventures by the thousand wait out there!
When we rode up from Sicily, the page and I,
We killed a robber, saw the Pope,
Danced in a masquerade, fasted two days,
Composed ten roundelays (in the vernacular),
And kissed a princess on the cheek.
David (*impressed*). A brave existence! But I am
free
To take my share of it and never do.
Guido. That's strange—you stay here willingly!
But why?
David. Adventures do not wait out there—for me.

Guido. Absurd! If we could only go right now—
Think, lad, of the seas unsailed, the tourneys missed,
The battles others fight, the roads not cantered on;
That very road, so plain and real and white,
Leads out to courts and castles of romance.
A road like that led to Emmaus once.
Why, now I think it would not be so hard
To meet Lord Jesus walking there alone,
Watching His springtime glisten up,
And humming to Himself! Yonder He comes!

David. Hush, Guido! Hush, you fool!

Guido. But look! The sun is on his hair! He's very young.

(*David goes to the edge, looks down, and turns back.*)

(*A voice singing on the road.*)

God's lark at morning I would be,
I'd set my heart within a tree
Close to His bed and sing to Him
Right merrily
A sunrise hymn.

David. A monk.

Guido. He's stopped by Tonio's donkey.

David. Means to steal him, likely.

Voice. Brother Ass, I give you good den. As I came down the road desiring greatly of your company, I did bethink me of the noble part you played, times past, in Holy Writ. Whereon said I, to the next ass I meet I will impart the goodly thoughts vouchsafèd me. But, prithee, Brother Ass, let not thine ears recede upon thy nape, nor

thy long face betoken grief of soul! These are *good* tidings that I bear. (*Laughs.*) Harken! Christ's Father, which is God, once spoke from out the belly of an ass, astounding much the prophet that bestrode him, and honoring your kinsman and his children's children, even to you. And later, another of your ancestors bore Christ Himself into Jerusalem. Wherefore, say I, you should be prouder than the horse, more praiseful than the bird, more—but that's enough!

Guido. Bravo, Sir Orator!

Voice. I would have sermoned twice as long had I but known two asses heard.

Guido (*laughing*). Your hermit's frock mates not with your light page's tongue.

Voice. Nay, Francis says the Lord loves best the happy heart.

Guido. And who is Francis?

Voice. God-a-lack!
Not know the little poor man of Assisi?
He says he is mere man like us. Perhaps—
But one in whom the breath of God has not yet cooled.

Guido. And you?

Voice. I am but one of many brethren!
We teach God's love and holy poverty,
But first we love and are ourselves most poor.
Come with us!

Guido. Are all as happy as you look?

Voice. You should hear Brother Francis sing!
Bethink you, friend, if this is God's dear world,
And we His children, if the years we have
To do His will are few, so few, O think

How wasted is all work not done for Him.
Ponder these things, young heart, and come with us . . .
And Jesus keep you—and the woeful ass!

(*Sings as he goes down the road.*)

At night I'd be God's troubadour.
Beneath His starry walls I'd pour
Across the moat such roundelays
He'd love me sure,
And maybe, praise.

Guido (*watching him disappear*). I think I'd almost like to go with him.

David. That's not Emmaus road. He'll not meet God.

Guido. Isn't it strange how God is easy to
Forget? And to remember too! Whole days
I go so brimful of the bliss of things
I never think of Him. And then He comes,
Quite naturally, and not at all displeased—
Perhaps a summer night scattered with stars,
Or far off in the dusk a sweet song heard,
Or when you're lonely and you want someone
To kiss you, to hold you close, and let you cry;
Or sometimes when the splendors seem to rain
And sunset skies quiver and rock with gold,
And voices call you and you hear your own
Answering back, swearing to go crusading,
Or to a hermit's cell, or on some quest.
It's strange . . . But He doesn't worry me a bit!

David. I hope you always find Him so, Guido.
But you've not sworn to go on the crusades?

Guido. Not truly sworn, just to myself.
Zounds! what a knightly quest! Worth all the blood
Spilled, and the failures! Let's go together, David.
David. Not worth, I swear, the life of one good man,
Although it won the Sepulchre.
Guido. By all the saints! I don't believe you think that!

(*David is silent.*)

'Tis natural we should revere His tomb—
Unless you have no faith that He is God?
David, do you, perchance, know other gods
Besides the old ones of the Trinity?
David. No. Do you?
Guido. Lots of 'em! Only listen!
Pallas, Persephone, Olympian Zeus,
Hermes, Artemis, Ganymede,—
David. And what became of them? Crucified too?
Guido. Oh, no; somehow they were forgotten.
David. You jest.
I thought you'd found, perhaps, another hope.
Guido. I'll tell you just the way I learned of them.
You see, the Emperor wished his pages taught
All wisdom of all countries and all times
So they might adepts in delightfulness
Become, to grace the earthly paradise
He'd made his court. I was his favorite page.
Oh, it was fairy stuff, that life of ours!
We'd sit or lie or sprawl about the fountain
In Monreale's high-built orange-court,
A score of laughing pages, olive-hued,
And gold-haired Enzio, the Emperor's son.

'Twould be sun-splashed up there, not hot nor cool,
But always thick with perfume from the trees,
And dim with water sounds and litanies
That friars pacing in the cloisters told.
And, morning long, an Arab sage would read
The precious parchments from Byzantium.
You've seen, David, some arch half hid in flowers
That winds and butterflies and birds blow through—
Well, such an arch I've always been till now,
With all the fragrance, rapture, melody
Of all the world just blowing through, lightly.
From those old parchments we young pages learned
Of men long dead who seemed to us ourselves,
Only more wise and radiant and fair,
Who lived in Greece once, loved with their whole strength
The earth and sun, and offered up their prayers
To many cool-eyed gods with rippling names.
But placid gods they were that never worked!

David. Forgotten gods in books to me are nothing.

Guido. For everyday they're not as good as Christ.
They are just beautiful; you pray to them,
They hardly hear; you'd never make them weep.
Of course you go to Christ when you are hurt,
Or when you feel—like a young tree in bloom!

David. Do you feel that way all the time?

Guido (*laughing*). Mostly!

(*Goes up on a parapet. The sunset is cloudless—transparencies of intense color.*)

God, God, how beautiful Your world is! Sometimes
It seems to me I should do something noble,

Some deed You'd love, to truly show my thanks . . .
David, this riding up and down the world
In scarlet hose is not enough, think you?
Others leave all they love to fight for Christ,
Or take the sea to find new lands for Him,
Or quit the dear society of men
To seek for angels in the wilderness.
They say that in the north, whole villages
Are sometimes struck with the wild thought of God,
And careless of their personal, sharp needs,
Give up their all to build Him palaces
Of blue and emerald glass and marble lace.
I'd hate another man to have
A goodlier soul than I! . . .
But how diversely we are lovable!
We must be quite a pleasure to our Lord.

A voice screaming. Son of David, have mercy on me!

Guido (*terribly startled*). What was that cry!

David. The madman's scream.

They burned out both his eyes for some old crime
And he went mad. His cell is under us.
Sometimes he screams like that.

Guido (*horrified*). Then there are other prisoners in this place?

David. From that bright room of yours you never see
The ghastly crew that I am captain of.
But there are those beneath your very feet
In dungeon after dungeon, who will die
And never see the sun. This is a hive
Of misery. You only heard one buzz.

Guido. They never come up here?
David. Only for you I break the prison's rules.
Guido. Who are they, down—down there?
David. Thieves, politicians, murderers, and such.
Mostly they die. Two only have been here
For many years.
Guido. What crimes did they commit?
David. One's a pirate, that roars and sings and curses;
Hugo by name. He begs to tell me his adventures.
Guido. I'd listen till he'd told me the last one!
I'd like to see that pirate . . . and the other?
David. A heretic.
Guido (*laughing*). So's the Emperor!
David. His is the deepest dungeon of them all,
No sun, no breath of air, just slime and stench.
Ten years ago when first they flung him there
His tongue was brash and peppery, they say,
His body broad and big, a fighting man's.
But he has rotted in that stinking hole.
I shade my lantern when I bring his food.
Guido. Horrible! Horrible! Does he cry out?
David. No. . . . Though he is heretic, he has
A God whose name he praises and whose strength
Implores. To me he never makes complaint;
But once he asked,
"Has Albi's faith yet spread to Italy?"
Guido. Albi! The home of heretics!
David. And once, "Is Simon dead?"
Guido. David, let's give a holiday to him
And to my pirate,
And bring them here to talk to us.

David. You could not stand the sight of him; his flesh
Is crumbled off, or fetid, white and stale.
They gave him for his faith the lepers' cell.
Guido. God! God! Leave him down there!
David. Yet I could hide him in a dead monk's cowl,
And, while the guards are absent, let them both
Come here to breathe the light and air once more.
You could guard one while I'd go fetch the other.
Guido. If both must come, bring up the pirate first,
So I may be alone with him—not with that other!
David. But *could* you guard the pirate? He's strong and——
Guido (*indignant*). By God! Could I? Because I dress in silk,
And sing a snatch, mayhap, and speak of birds
And blossoms and such amorous, frail things,
Thou thinkest me weakling!
With one good broadsword and a mind to it,
I'd guard secure a host of pirates! . . . 'Swounds!
(*Sees a sword lying on the bench.*)
Lend me that sword! . . . On guard! . . . Now, all your skill!

(*They fence. A sudden twist, and Guido catches David's sword with his, whirling it into the air. Guido in high spirits runs up to the battlement.*)

Guido. That old Sicilian trick!
Now who is master here? Free, free, O world!
Now could I cut the gold-haired jailer's head off
And steal his keys and rush out to the road,

And lark it down to Sicily again.

David (*repressing his admiration*). I'd love to be your battle brother once,
And, standing by your side, strike down a hundred!

Guido. David, you almost angered me. Bring up the prisoners!

(*Exit David. Guido sits with his feet hanging over the parapet and sings.*)

O, shall I sail the rough, bright sea,
And on some glittering morn
Blow with the wind that blows so free,
Up to a strange and a fair countree,
And wind on my silver horn?

Or shall I loosen my long, grey lance,
Leap my stallion astride,
And down the mottled wood-paths prance
To capture the city of romance
That the golden cloud-banks hide?

Sing heigh, sing ho! The bliss of being,
The glory of days that rush,
So much to be doing, hearing, seeing,
With spring foaming up, and winter a-fleeing,
And the rose of youth in blush!

(*Enter David with Hugo, enormous, red-bearded, this side of middle age. David goes out.*)

Guido. Men say you have been in your day
The fearfulest rover of the seas.

Hugo. They said not half. My soul can count

More dreadful deeds than the Old Man of the Mountain,
And more are yet to do.

Guido. You've sailed, perhaps, the western sea?

Hugo. Western and eastern, Pontic and Caspian!

Guido. And seen the marvels of the world's grey edge?

Hugo. All of them. Once for twenty days I sailed
Beyond the gateways of the world into the west.
The winds had voices like the damned,
There was no sun; the sea was like——

Guido. The flameless, grey, upheaving boundaries of hell
Where drift those truckling spirits who in life
Shunned the affray.

Hugo. A-hem! Have you been there?

Guido. Well, as it were . . . Go on. As you roved up
The heliotrope, soft sea of Greece
Did you, perchance, catch glimpses of
The women of the sea?

Hugo. A many a one.

Guido. How looked they?

Hugo. Sleek and bosomed high.

Guido. What color were their eyes?

Hugo. I noted not their eyes.

Guido. Blind fool! But never mind, I know.

(*David enters with the heretic, who wears the white habit of a monk, the cowl over his head hiding his face. He can hardly walk; David supports him. He pauses, dazed by the late sunlight, then sits on the bench at back center, silently.*)

Guido (*nervously covering the embarrassment of their entrance*). David, this man hath seen the women of the sea,
And found them fair.
Hugo. But not as fair by half
As those of earth. Jesu, no sight of one
For these damned years I've rotted here;
And there's a many a town on many a shore
Where lasses weep and beat their breasts for me.
Guido. Hast thou adventured in the further south
Where spicier seas
Break on the carven shores of lovelier lands,
Where women, sultry-hued as summer's myrtle,
With half-closed, tawny eyes that never close,
Await far sails of vaster glittering
That bear superbly to their attared arms
More bright-haired, iron-chested lovers
Out of the north?
Hugo. To the neighboring isles,
And there I'll harbor on my next adventure.
Guido. I love thee, Hugo.
Thou art the most heroicalest liar
Leewards of greedy hell.
Hugo. A man must be to keep apace with you.
But you, I swear, are not a common jailer.
What is your land and lineage?
Guido. My home, Palermo; my estate, the Emperor's love.
Hugo. A courtly knight! A silken squire of dames!
I wager you are served with jades a-plenty.
David. Do you know love, real love, Guido?

Guido. The gods have not vouchsafed me that transmuting test,
But I have longed for Circe and,
Remembering her sties, still longed.
Hugo. Who may that lady be?
Guido. A witch of qualities.
Hugo. As?
Guido. Shadow robes that cling, and shadow eyes,
Warm, tulip-tinted mouth, all else Carrara whiteness.
The prodigal son was hireling to her, and forgot
Even his father, eating of her husks.
David. Is she the lady, Guido, has a house
In Florence, where the other jailers now
Drink of her wine and—eat her husks?
Guido. The same, the same! I'm glad you're here, David.
It's easy to forget they're husks in April;
Then lechery is iridescent-winged,
Mere throbbing up of leafy sun-drawn sap;
Mere clinging of frail lips; mere mockery
Of light-intoxicated eyes,
That thrill together under lowered lids—
Half irresistible and wholly sweet.
And yet—I'm glad we're here, David.
Hugo. If I were free this afternoon,
I know a harlot's house in Florence——
Guido. Ah, there it is! Always the same!
There's nothing this side love but vileness;
And without either there's such rapture i' the world.
Let's keep it so, O jailer of my heart.
Forget the sirens for awhile, thou bearded beast,
And tell us brackish tales of the wild sea.

Hugo. I have no notion who the sirens be,
Nor Circe, nor what means
That womanish, springtime talk of yours.
I doubt me if ye know a broadsword from a dirk.
You could not understand a lively man's adventures.
Guido. David, I think we hold in vile captivity
The fieriest brigand that ever slew—with words,
The doughtiest sailor that ever sailed—by breath.
Of course, he may have pulled a harbor yawl,
Or held for ransom valiantly a capture of sardines.
Nay, more, I grant, with faithful henchmen by,
He may have subjugated, cheese and all,
An irate granny-dame, sail set for market.
Hugo. Body of Christ!
Shall flesh and blood endure this popinjay,
This thing of silk, this—— Before you came,
A red worm thing into the bellowing world,
I'd waded knee-deep in fresh human blood,
Slain Greeks a hundred, sacked the vizier's harem,
Gathered a hamper full of sacred bones,
And, drunk on sacramental wine, sailed back
To Venice with two span of iron horses.
Guido (*delighted*). You on the gorgeous Byzantine crusade?
Did you not catch the tale from other lips
When you were linkboy on the Grand Canal?
Hugo. These very hands, thou saucy innocent,
Have purpled with imperial bastards' blood;
These eyes saw Dandolo's fleet assault the walls,
The Greeks' vermilion tent and molten oil,
The mangonels and catapult and bridge.
When André of Urboise dashed through the breach

I followed, and 'twas I first lit the torch
That fired a thousand houses, where old men
And slattern women howled and cursed and burned!
That was a real crusade! Gold, wine
And women whose consent the sword could always win.
These are dull times! Hey, silent monk!
Preach Christ and war against the infidel!
That's the brave life! With heathen gold
And heathen concubines, who would not fight
For Christ?

David. Now would you be crusader, Guido?

Guido. The beast!

Hugo (*in high fettle*). Then I've another crusade tale for you.
Sweet Christ! 'Twas a divine burlesque!
Of all that crossed the sea not one returned
Save me, their leader.

Guido. Your lies grow wearisome.

David (*with premonition and repression*). Say on, say on!

Hugo. It was in France, near such a day as this;
We idled in the southern harbor there,
Our seven empty hulls against the quays.
I do remember well, 'twas afternoon.
On deck we slept beneath the sails or diced
And wished the night would come. Then suddenly,
From the hill crest where the wide street came down,
We heard a shout, and, looking up, beheld—
You'll know I'm lying now—it looked a dream—
A thousand children

(*David leaps up and stands white and taut.*)

with flowers on their heads
And crosses in their hands and wreaths and banners;
And when they saw us or the sea or something,
They fell upon their knees with prayers and cries,
Kissed one another, wept, went mad with joy.
While we, chap-fallen, watched their antics, up
They sprang, broke into hymns to Jesus and
Came down the sloping street right to the sea.

Guido. But why?

Hugo. Baccho! It was the Crusade of the Children,
And they were marching with their songs and flowers
To take Christ's Sepulchre!

Guido. What's in Jerusalem?

Hugo. Yea, verily.

Guido. But that was France!

Hugo. They came to us and said, "We're almost there;
Dear friends, we know, for we have marched so long;
And Christ has sent you here with seven ships
To ferry us across the sea." Whereon,
They knelt to us and called us, "Brothers in Christ,"
"Seamen of God," "Our Lady's mariners."
It had astounded you.

Guido. But so you were!
You took them to the Holy Tomb of Christ?

Hugo. Thou fool! That night we spent apart in council.
Next day, our scheme complete, we went to them
And swore to bear them to the Sepulchre.

Guido. I knew you would, our Lady's mariner!

Hugo. We herded them aboard our seven ships

And sailed for Alexandria—a golden freight!

Guido. Why there, and not unto Jerusalem?

Hugo. Children are precious to the infidel!
We sold the last one to the Turk; not one returned!
And there they do remain to this good hour,
Their slaves and concubines!

(*David, with a terrible cry, flings himself on Hugo, hurls him to the floor, strangles him. Guido with difficulty pulls him off.*)

Guido. Which is his cell?

David. To the right, the last.

(*David lies sobbing on the floor, while Guido takes Hugo out and returns.*)

Guido. There is some wickedness I had not guessed.

David (*beside himself*). I was one! I was one!

Guido. What do you mean?

David. I was a child-crusader! The dog! The dog!
Then they, too, failed. No man had heard their fate.
I thought they sailed and reached the Sepulchre!
There is no justice and no right,
No pity and no kindness in the world!
Only the vile things prosper and live on.
Where is your God?

Guido. I know not. I know nothing . . . But you—
Were you a child-crusader there in France?

David. Oh, no. Listen, Guido! Here's my life!

(*David pauses to control himself, then proceeds with suppressed passion.*)

I was a shepherd boy beyond the Rhine.

A hilltop was my home. All summer there
I'd watch my flocks about me pasturing.
I could throw a stone and hit the road below me;
It was the road that led out to the world.
All day I'd lie and watch from the deep grass
The marvelous people passing—troubadours
With viol da gambas on their backs and singing;
Fat priests and friars, sometimes a cardinal,
And green and scarlet pages, little like me,—
I'd halloa down to them—and then the knights,
Always the noble knights with flashing mail
And retinues of stalwart men-at-arms.
The proudest-seeming always journeyed south,
Seeking Christ's Sepulchre, they said. They said
The infidels had made it theirs somehow,
Ruined and fouled and desecrated it;
And if God's knights could capture it again,
The sins o' the world would pass, and every sorrow,
And likely Christ would come again unto His own.
And somehow there were wings through all the air
In those first days. In the deep silence when
The sun stood still at noon and the flocks slept,
I'd hear, I thought, the angels all about me;
They walked among my sheep upon my hill.
And something always was about to break
Between another world and me.
I waited and was sure, some day, quite soon,
A glory would come true and I would kneel
I' the grass and see the Lord before me, close,
Yes, close enough to touch and talk to. Then one day
I found what I'd been wishing for so long.
Down on the road, far off, behind the hill,

I heard a hundred voices singing, not
Gleemen or pages, but like seraphim.
I knelt and waited, and the sheep were still.
Louder the singing grew and louder, then
Around the hillside into the sun they burst,
A host of children, a heavenly host,
With crosses in their hands and on their breasts.
They called to me and I came down and left my flock
And went with them, a soldier of the Christ. . . .
Guido, Guido, Guido, it was not fair!
We were so sure of God, we meant so well!
He let us starve and rot among the fields,
He lost us in the snow and ice of mountains,
We died, and died, and died, but still pushed on,
For we were only children and believed.

Guido. And those that did not die?

David. Half-frozen, starved,
We staggered from the dreadful mountain pass
And saw beneath us in the sunlight Italy.
We thought it was the Promised Land. In tears,
With arms around the weaker ones, we hurried
Down the great mountain side to meet the Christ.

Guido. If only this could be a lie or dream!

David. We knew the end was surely near. We wove
Garlands and wreaths to lay upon His Tomb.
Our leader was a lad named Nicholas—
When souls are sacreder than his they will
Not take the flesh! . . . One night he called us round
And climbed upon a gateway in our midst
And spoke to us.

His face shone in the dark.
He said, a final test the Lord had laid—
Across our path He'd stretched the mighty sea.
The children, terrified, broke into sobs;
But Nicholas called, not loudly, but the way he had,
"In olden times a children's army marched
Across the sea dry-shod; and they, indeed,
Were children but of one named Israel,
While we are Christ's!
The sea will hedge itself on either side
And leave a path for us to walk between."
So we believed and sang beneath the stars.
The next day, verily, we saw the sea
And Genoa, beneath whose walls we camped.
Nicholas named the following dawn as hour
When we should march dry-shod across the sea.
How happy we who had been faithful to the end!
Our labors all were done. We could not sleep.
Long before dawn I went to Nicholas
And knelt and begged that I might be
Among the first of them that walked into the sea.
He flung his arms around me and cried out,
"David, we two shall lead the lambs of God."
After a long, long time the dawn began:
The army knelt and prayed together the last time,
And rose, and with their flowers and their roods
Marched solemnly unto the water's edge;
And first of all went Nicholas and I.
The water touched my shoes and did not part;
But yet I knew it would and kept right on.
Deeper and deeper—my knees—my waist—the cold
Stole to my heart—the prayers died out within me.

But I kept on. And I was blind before
The water reached my eyes and smothered me.
Guido. And then?
David. I lay on the beach in the sun,
People laughing and shouting around . . .
Guido. That was the end?
David. The end. The lambs were scattered.
In time they hid themselves about the world.
Guido. And you?
David. A little band that still could not believe
God would so fool and trap them, went to Rome
To tell Christ's shepherd there, the Pope.
I went along, not knowing where to go.
Guido. The Holy Father said?
David. That we were disobedient, pert children,
That we should go with speed back to our homes,
That we might win forgiveness if, when grown,
We took the sword to win Christ's Sepulchre.
So I knew that the world was bad, and one
Must live in it awhile like any beast.
I stole away, came here, and—here I am.
That is my life!
You say the world is beautiful, the spring
Is God's, that road is lately trod by Christ—
Lies! lies! God is not here! I don't believe!

(*It has grown dusk. The old man suddenly rises and strides forward to David. He seems tall and fearful; his voice is terrible.*)

Serle de Lanlarazon. He is! Thou *dost* believe!
Naught else so plain!
Dost think this marvelous, shining soul of thine,

That will not shatter into common vileness,
Though tested with the blows of agony,
Can be a cup for aught but heavenly wine?
Lo, thou dost brim with God!

Guido. Who art thou, strange and terrible old man?

Serle. Serle de Lanlarazon, the heretic!
I, too, was once a soldier of the Lord,
O shepherd boy, and I, too, met defeat.
They that were noblest of the sons of men
I have seen butchered, and the land of all
Lands peacefulest ravished and soaked in blood!
Mine eyes beheld five hundred women burned
At Carcassonne—they walked into the flames
As into lovers' arms! When Béziers fell,
They that were burned, women and boys and babes,
Escaped such tortures and abominations
As made the flames seem tenderer than sleep.
Yet, blinded by injustice too clear seen,
Shall I denial make of Him that steels
This vile and coward soul of ours
To unendurable and gainless agonies?
Yea, verily, His acts, seen singly, take
The cast of madness, and but momently
We see what is as wisdom. Yet behold,
Nothing can goad the bleeding soul of man
Unto sublimity that tops the stars,
Like undeservèd wrong and mad injustice!
These women that died horribly for faith,
Your children urged to folly by a dream,
The broken spirits of the world that are
Its torches—these are the testament of fire

Struck from the flint! What hand but His
Could draw from this poor stuff of ours—Light!
Who sees the flame hath seen divinity!
Guido. What was the evil that your people wrought
There in Provence to earn such punishment?
Serle. They saw the truth and dared to speak it loud!
Against them stood the Church of Rome, once pure,
But now become as foul as leprosy!
(*David and Guido are horrified.*)
We fearlessly cried out, "Unclean, unclean!
Beseech the healing hands of Christ, proud Rome."
Guido (*aside to David*). He does not know!
Serle. But she that called herself the church of Christ,
Hearing the truth, slew them that dared to speak.
Guido. What need was there to speak? In Sicily,
We see her faults, as you, but let them be.
Serle. Then ye are cowards!
My people have a more heroic heart.
Wilt call it life to see the truth struck down
And not unsheath thy sword in her defense?
Wilt call it life to hear the voice of God
But cravenly to hide and mute the tidings?
Life, life—
Is't not the test of all we know as good
Embattled 'gainst the all we know as evil,
The Eternal Right against the Eternal Wrong?
O child, the perfume and the bloom of life,
Youth's song of yearning underneath the moon,
These fade. But there's a splendor never fades;
And he enlisting as God's knight-at-arms

Wages a fight that has not any end,
Whose prize more sacred is than Palestine,
Whose gain's no tomb, but an eternal life.
David. Then thou'dst not counsel us to cross the sea
And go crusading to Jerusalem?
Serle. His fight is not across the seas, but here!
Guido. Then were the battles that my heroes fought—
Richard and Godfrey and the rest—all wrong?
Serle. Nay, nay. Somehow, it is God's deep desire
That stirs the hearts of men to that adventure.
But 'tis a fool's adventure! To you, to me,
How could His Tomb more potent be to save
Than any field of earth where flowers grow?
The noble striving's everything, and Christ
In kindness let them fail! . . .
Yet, fairer far the quest for that poor Tomb
Than all the wars that men have waged before
For hate or gain or merely idleness. . . .
The world grows better. . . . Thou sayest Simon's dead?
David. Ay.
Serle. And Innocent that preached the war?
David. Dead, too.
Serle. And there is peace 'twixt heretic and Church?
David. The wars have ceased.
Guido. And there's for emperor
A friend of truth, no matter how bedight—
A host to all the wisdom of the world
Though hailing from Provence or India.

Arab and Jew, Mohammedan and Greek,
Find courtesy and hearing in Palermo.
Serle. Have I not heard the coming of the Lord?
The darkness giveth forth much inner light
And loneliness lets in diviner guests.
The years of my captivity have brought
Much wisdom I had missed. Even, I trace
Nobility in them that tortured us!
Simon and Innocent worked for a God
That is my God, although their work was mad
And evil only. We who swore that Evil was
Itself eternal and not born of Good,
Who died for that belief, we were not wholly wise.
It is a truth, but one forgetting which
Need vary not one whit the lives of men.
All know that good and evil are at war,
And in that war all lordly souls enlist,
Roman or heretic or infidel.
What matter the first cause? For battle-cry
To all the gallantry beneath the stars,
Two words suffice: "He is!" . . .
I long for but one thing before I die—
Not to incite my people 'gainst the Pope,
Nor bear the southern standard in the strife,
But to assure them of the living God. . . .
Across the edges of the world there blows a wind
Mysterious with perfume of a spring;
A spring that is not of the kindling earth,
That's more than scent of bloom or gleam of bud;
The spring of God in flower!
Down there where neither sun nor air came through,
I felt it blow across my dungeon walls—

The wind before the footsteps of the Lord!
It bloweth now across the world;
It strangely stirs the hearts of men; wars cease;
Rare deeds familiar grow; fastings and prayers,
Forgiveness, poverty; temples are built
On visioned impulses, and children march
On journeys with no end.
Far off, far off He comes,
And we are swept upon our knees
As meadow grasses kneeling to the wind.

Guido. Thou man of God!

(*He falls impetuously on his knees before Serle, catching hold of his hands. So close, he sees his hideous, disfigured face and falls back with an involuntary cry of loathing. It is twilight.*)

Serle (*gazing intently at his hands*). Are these my hands? Rotted and numb!

(*He slowly realizes, and with a strangled groan falls to the ground.*)

Serle. Leper! Leper!

Guido. Old man, old man, forgive me!

David. Hush . . . He speaks!

Serle. Dost think that I have lived these bloody years,
Endured these agonies and fought this fight,
That I should now deliver thee my soul
Because thou eatest away this flesh of mine,
Stealing the maggots' certain meal? Back, back,
O Prince of Darkness, this flame thou canst not eat!
(*Staggers to his feet.*)
Shepherd, I feel the stars!

David. There will be many soon.

Serle (*lifting his arms*). God of battles, I, that was a man,
Do offer up to Thee that which remains!
Thine enemy hath eat the flesh of me
And made me fetid in the sight of men,
And soon he sendeth death to bear me hence.
O Lord, the little life vouchsafèd me,
Let it not waste in useless burial.
Thou comest soon again to see Thy people.
O let me go once more to my Provence
To tell them of Thy coming and of Thee!
Thou that dost love the fighting heart of man,
Let me prepare them! Let me, O Lord, go home.

David (*kneeling*). Lord, I am Thy child! Forgive me all
And let me fight again in Thy behalf!
Bless me, old man, for I shall take thee home.

Guido. David, thou'lt set him free?

David. And more, much more.
I'll go with him, protect him, follow him,
And preach with him the God he's shown to me. . . .
I'll steal the horses and set forth to-night;
Across the Tuscan border we are safe.

Guido. But what, old man, is this that you would preach?

Serle. Prepare, prepare! The Lord walks in His world!

Guido. And should they ask your name?

Serle. Serle de Lanlarazon.

Guido. The heretic!

Serle. But come to preach with late-learned gentleness
A God all men accept.
David. The wars have ceased, Guido.
Guido. Because the heretics are slain.
Serle. They could not wholly die.
Guido. If they should ask, "Serle de Lanlarazon,
When you cursed Rome, did you then lie?"
Serle. It was the truth.
Guido. Is evil still itself, eternal?
Serle. As always, hence the eternal strife.
Guido. Do you recant? Submit you to the church?
Serle. A thousand times, no.
Guido. David, you ride to death!
When they discover he who preaches God 's
Lanlarazon, they'll burn the two of you,
No matter if his words were learned of Christ!
Serle. Wouldst counsel cowardice?
Guido. Not that, I swear, not that! But what's the gain?
Serle. There is no gain, perhaps; the fight is all.
Guido. I see no fight. I see a wide-flung glory,
A world that is not bad, so full of beauty
I need no proof, as thou, it comes from God.
Serle. The beauty thou dost know is temporal.
Thou seest the world dew-drenched! 'Tis drenched in blood!
Guido. I am not less a-shine with God than thou!
Serle. The God of youth, a fair god but most frail.
Guido. Him I adore; I see, I need no other.
Serle. Already thou dost fear and wait His death!
This little prelude to eternity,

Is it an hour of roses and of song?
This throe that leads at last to heaven or hell,
Is loveliness its only quality?
What of the large endurance of the soul?
The heroic heart, the wild nobility?

Guido. All that will come—I have so many years to live!

Serle. If thou wert free this instant, where wouldst thou go?

Guido. To Sicily!

Serle. Once there, what wouldst thou do?

Guido. The Emperor's court has thousands of delights.

Serle. And is that all?

Guido. Then, later——

Serle. What? What?

David. No crusades, Guido.

Serle. Wilt thou not offer up thy gallant heart
To something sterner than delights of youth?
Thou hast drunk deep of happiness, wilt still
Drink on, oblivious to all but bliss?
(*Tenderly.*) Child of the springtime voice, could youth last always
There were no need of heaven. . . .
In youth the world is but an April wood
Through which we ride with holiday, light hearts.
The boughs are dreamy with new-opened blooms,
The laughter of the air shakes petals down,
The forest paths are dappled with the sun,
And youth rides by with half-closed, taunting eyes,
Drinking his fill of Life's delicious prime,
In idleness that is a noble dream.

He hears the breathing of the magic world,
And, head-bent, listens to the inner song
That gushes lustrously from his own heart.
Yet, as he rides, anon he hears far off
Across the boughs a trumpet note; he stops,
And something stirs and answers deep in him.
The sound fades; on he rides. A nearer blast
Shouts out; Youth listens with his lifted eyes;
Another! The blossoms are broken! Another, more loud!
And suddenly all of the wood is shaken with trumpets and shouts
And calls and commands and sounds of the battle affray.
For, lo! the wood leads out to the bloody, bare plain
Where the legions of God are engaged to the death.
Hard pressed are the knights of the Lord; they charge and are felled,
And arise and return to be slain.
And over the clamor and dust of the fight,
The thundering voice of the Lord
Giving heart to the banners of purple and red of His hosts!
And filled with the dreams and the wonder he learned in the woods,
Youth rushes in, turns his back to the sunshine and glamor,
Draws sword and brings succor to them that are faint
And oppressed with the strife, and fights on till he dies.
Thou too, thou too art lordly-souled, O youth,
Thou wilt not shun the sword-play of thy God!
Choose! The bare plain is ahead!

David (*turning passionately to Guido*). Come with us, Guido. His words seem God's to me;
And thou art not afraid. Thou broughtest
Into the evil world around me here
Goodness, and I remembered Nicholas.
Thou art my only friend. Come with us, Guido.

(*Guido stands with lifted head, deeply moved, uncertain. A film of amethyst afterglow is across the west; there are many stars. Intense silence, then the sound of a shepherd's flute rises from the road, passes, and fades. A long pause. Guido listens, entranced.*)

Guido. Didst hear that flute?

Serle. Not when the voice of God rings in my ears!

Guido (*passionately*). My God spoke also! My God is not your God!
Why do ye think the trees disrobe themselves
In gales of color gorgeously,
Instead of one swift greyness;
Why do ye think the stars swing past
In visible magnificence?
The sea could bear its traffic
Without the tumult of its coloring;
Sheep could be led without that shepherd's fluting,
And children born without the primrose moon
In western skies! Deaf and blind!
Ye speak as transients through life, who know
Nothing of this divine, mysterious earth
My element! Speak not to me of purposes,
Sure death, eternal wrong!
I am a leaf of scarlet,

A summer-tinted cloud,
A kiss in the dark, forgotten soon,
But red, desired of many!
Hell does not gape beneath my feet, and if
About my head the almond blossoms crowd,
What need have I of heaven? . . . David, David,
I cannot go!

(*A pause. The sound of horses approaching on the road. All listen.*)

Guido. The guards returning!

David. No, not before midnight.

Guido. What can it be? . . . God, let me out of this place!

(*The horses stop below. A boy's voice calls "Master!"*)

Guido (*calls down*). Felice! It's my page, David! He's come for me!
Page of mine, come up, come quickly up!
(*Watching over the parapet.*)
An empty saddle! That's for me! Free, free!
They've tied their horses just below us—
They've crossed the moat—They're coming—
Sicily! At last! At last!

David (*rousing himself*). But you are prisoners! If you are seen, then I am prisoner too.
(*Sound of footsteps in the corridor.*) Too late!

(*Felice, a thirteen-year-old page, rushes in, leaps into Guido's arms. A guard follows with a torch; fixes it in the wall and goes out.*)

Felice. Master, I found the Emperor at Capua
In conference with the papal delegates.
The long feud's at an end.
He and the Pope are friends and you're released—
Downstairs his nuncio makes all arrangements.
Our horses wait below!

Guido. What a page! David, you know Felice.
I wish that you could go with us!
We'll start at once. Good-bye, good-bye,
Dear friends, we're off to Sicily!

Felice. Not Sicily.

Guido. Not Sicily?

Felice. The Emperor sends us on a mission north.

Guido. But where?

Felice. Into Provence.

Guido. With roundelays to some fair Queen of Love?

Felice. Nay, Master, 'tis at last the great adventure!

Guido. Speak out, Felice.

Felice. We bear the tidings of a great crusade.
To-morrow we'll be soldiers of the Cross.

Guido. Go on.

Felice. The Pope has won the Emperor's consent
To lead an army 'gainst the heretics.

Guido. 'Tis a lie!

Felice. It is the truth.
And we to bishops, princes, potentates
Bring the good news—
War, war, till the last heretic is dead.

Serle. My people, O my people!
Shepherd, we must go now!

David. Too late. The guard who brought the page
is now below
Warning them I've unloosed the prisoners.
They will return to put us both in chains.

Serle. O God, the murders and the burnings once
again!
Must the truth die utterly, utterly!

(*A sound of footsteps.*)

David. There is the guard.

Guido. Close that door. (*David hesitates.*) Close it,
Bolt it.

(*David and Felice close and bolt the great door leading into the interior of the castle.*)

Guido. Up on my shoulder, page. Take down the
ladder.

(*Felice on Guido's shoulder climbs up and takes down the rope ladder from Guido's window.*)

'Twill reach the ground.

(*A loud knock on the door.*)

Quick, make it fast.

(*They fasten the ladder to the parapet so that it drops to the road. Voices inside call "Open!"*)

Guido (*calls out*). I am the prisoner to be released.
Three minutes, friends, while I change raiment. . . .
David, Felice, take the old man down,
Ride north!
Five minutes' start and you are safe.
Go, warn them that so soon must die.

David. But you?

Guido (*taking David's broadsword*). I'll hold them here.

Felice. Master——

Guido. Go, page of mine, Felice.

Serle. Thou child of God!

(*David falls on his knees and catches Guido's hand, overcome.*)

Guido. Go, David, quickly, quickly—God-speed!

(*Felice and David with difficulty help Serle over the parapet and disappear. Guido stands before the door, leaning on his sword.*)

How hatefully thou lovest me, God!

Voices within. Open.

Guido. Another minute, friends!

(*Cries of "Open," confused noise; they batter on the door, finally breaking it in.*)

Guido. Back, there, villains!

(*Guido rushes in with the broadsword, forcing them into the passageway. The sound of horses' hoofs; it dies out. Guido fights desperately; a guard rushes under his arm, stabs him. He staggers and falls. The guards enter, look around, think he is dead and go out. Enter Felice over the edge of the parapet.*)

Felice. Master, Master!

(*Finds Guido and lifts him in his arms.*)

Guido. Thou, Felice? . . . Thou didst return to me?

Felice. I could not leave thee.

Guido. I'm glad. . . . And they have gone?

Felice. They're safe. . . . But thou art wounded!

Guido. I'm glad we are alone. 'Tis almost like
Dying in Sicily.

Felice. Master, thou canst not die!

Guido. I should not die.
Death has mistook his quarry, and Jesus sleeps.

(*He sinks down.*)

Felice (*terrified*). I'll fetch a priest.

Guido. Stay here.
I am beyond the laying on of hands.
My deeds were not. My aspirations lacked
Not beauty, but singleness of purpose.
And I have lived.
No priest can mend what's broken here.
And for the rest . . .
Persephone or Mary will recall
That I on earth was young and beautiful. . . .
Help me up, page, where I may see the world.

(*Felice supports him to the parapet.*)

I shall miss the iris skies and wet, clear stars
Of these our April evenings . . .
And thee, Felice . . .
Can any other world be half so lovely,
Or any other life so sweet?
This earthly ecstasy not yet half-lived,
This heady vintage of days and nights
Sipped only . . . Perhaps it is as well. . . .
When thou dost see Palermo, rising from the sea,
Felice, think of me. . . .

The bursting wave of life,
Breast it with twofold joy, remembering me.
Felice (*sobbing*). I am thy page. Ah, leave me not alone.
Guido. Hush, hush! But yet, forget me never.
Hold me—I cannot see—There, there—
I would that now I could find words of counsel
Which might protect thee always; but
I, too, am young and still untaught.
Yet treasure this:
Pray often, as you sing, unthinkingly;
'Twill Jesus please, and then, it sweetens one.
O littlest comrade of my heart,
Doubt not the world is good and mankind mostly noble.
That I have lived unstained
Hath profited me surely by the gift
Of deep delight. The lips of harlotry
Can never kiss the sun
With the light rapture that was ours. . . .
The rest I did not learn.
Felice. Why didst thou fight to save those men, Master?
Guido. Something about God—I can't remember—
I *had* to fight—
Closer, Felice. . . . I'm sleepy.
Sing me that song we made
As we rode up from Sicily.
Felice. I cannot.
Guido. The little song . . .
Felice (*sings*).

Jesu,
If Thou wilt make
Thy peach trees bloom for me,
And fringe my bridle paths both sides
With tulips red and free,
If Thou wilt make Thy skies as blue
As ours in Sicily,
And wake the little leaves that sleep
On every bending tree,
I promise not to vexen Thee
That Thou shouldst make eternally
Heaven, my home.
But right contentedly——

Master! Master!

(*Guido dies.*)

Voice of the Madman. Son of David, have mercy on us!

NEW MOON

Now day,
Drawing his golden waters down the west,
Forsakes the loitering, low-bosomed moon.
Naked amid the unaccustomed stars
She stands, afraid, then down the shining ebb
Hastens to hide her girlish loveliness
From their too youthful wonder in the sea.

WHERE ILIUM WAS PROUD

Along the sands where Ilium was proud
A crimson laurel bush, that draws, perhaps,
From Priam's ancient buried house its blood,
Sprinkles with flame the unbeholding waste
In luxury of summer-hearted bliss.
Ah, better so its given years to burn
Unseen of maidens and young warriors
Than, plucked untimely, to have flushed an hour
The white of Helen's bosom on a night
When Paris leaned across the lights and laughter
To drink her up with hot, unmanly eyes.
Its crimson, fading with the dawn, had been
Only a deathless tale in poets' mouths.

EURIPIDES

To him the fate we bear was like a sea
That sweeps above the many ships that sailed,
And waits as home for all that sail again.
Bitter intolerably, and deep as death;
But shining, too, shining and full of spray,
In color stainèd lovelier than the sky,
Singing a requiem for them that die
Adventuring on its bounds, or, dauntless, sing
When roaring and inevitable wash
Heaves down the prows. . . . His heart was full of stars,
His prayers only to gods that deathlessly
Abide and dream no sin. And Syracuse
That builded on the sea, loved his name most.

FAREWELL TO ETNA

Great mountain, swathed in blue with foamy crest
Of fire, majestic as the mighty sea,
Thy brother and immortal comrade close,
The stars except, sole comrade fitting, equal—
Only, perhaps, as dust upon the wind
Shall I behold again thy spreading might.
Yet no regret is mine. I have thee in
My soul, though lodgment base, where room the stars
And many a tide of vestal-footed ocean.
Nor waste I tears that now the Cyclops brood
Is dead, and never hoarse, heroic blast
Shall hurl again in white and purple yeast
Odysseus and the dark-eyed mariners.
Nor foe of gods nor friend thy splendor saw
Than now more dark, more high majestical.
Thy color of solemnity doth stain
The temporal and wayward thing I house.
But if, when I am sown upon the air,
Another, seeing thee against the sunken sun
In folds of wine-dark gauze and amethyst,
Should rise to exaltation more superb
Than mine, and praise with loftier flight of soul
Thy splendor that to-night is all my own—
That were regret! Lend me thy purple thought,
Eternal brooding vigilant, that I
May counsel with my soul to rival his.

THE IMMORTAL RESIDUE

Love and the lofty heart and tears—these three
Immortal are, and draw eternally
Deep from the young world's loveliness their life.
The kiss, the prayer, the cry—the same to-day
As when the brute with noble pang distressed
Cleared the abysm and was man. Than these
Not surer come the stars, nor flooding up
The rainy slopes of spring dark violets.
More utterly than sunset cloud dissolved,
Soft Syracuse has passed. The bannered fleet
That flashed into her harbor scornfully
Left not a ghostly sail to haunt the blue.
And they that heard in Athens ere they came
Great Socrates, whose spoken word was like
The calm intoning of the lustral ocean,
Before they perished in their slavery,
Bequeathed not any dream for us to learn.
Nor shall we know the thought of those tall girls
That stood where now the yellow gorse stands high,
And in their golden, fluttering loveliness
Watched the young prisoners. Instead, remain
The bay, the bubble air, the secret dust,
These, and the mortal kinship that we own.
Kisses they whispered for I beg to-day.
Their eyes did never blur but I could guess.
And as their spirits stood, tall as the sword
Of one that guards the portal of a queen
And leans thereon in moonlight, mine hath stood.

I know their loves and wingèd hearts and tears,
And mine shall every man that lives know too;
And so the same, forever, to the close.
Perhaps some spring a thousand years from now
Two crowned ineffably with youth, their hearts
A-toss in wind-flower dance before the sun,
Loitering lover-wise across the fields
And empty places that I knew, may chance
Upon the rubble where I dream, and muse:
"Those old barbarians, dead so long ago,
Was life to them so fair, and did the sun
Shine honey-sweet into their open hearts?
Could they have ever dreamed such love as ours,
Or dared, O love, this slow, divinest kiss?"
Their words, I know, shall warm the flower roots
That were my heart. To them as now to me
May day be only blue; all moon the night;
And may enamored fate a little while
Hold back their portion due of tears and dark.

SET OF MOON

The archeress had gone;
A western hill across her path still bore
The magic of her recent footing there;
And upwards all the air was lustral pure.
The city slept, but far above shone bright
The city of the gods that never sleep.

PART II. LYRICAL PIECES

OVERTONES

I heard a bird at break of day
Sing from the autumn trees
A song so mystical and calm,
So full of certainties,
No man, I think, could listen long
Except upon his knees.
Yet this was but a simple bird
Alone, among dead trees.

IN NEW YORK

1. ON SUNDAY MORNING

Far, far from here the church bells ring,
As when I was a child,
And there is one I dearly love
Walks in the sunlight mild.
To church she goes, and with her once
I went, a little child.

The church bells ring far, far away,
The village streets are bright,
The sunlight falls in slanting bars
And fills the church with light.
And I remember when I knelt
Beside her, in delight.

There's something lost, there's something lost,
Some wisdom has beguiled!
My heart has flown a thousand miles
And in the sunlight mild
I kneel and weep beside her there
As she prays for her child.

2. THE SONG YOU LOVE

When I have sung the sweet songs and the sad,
The songs of magic drifting from above,
The trumpet songs that shout across men's souls,

The sleep-song, breasted softer than the dove,
Still there will be one song I have not sung—
The song you love, the song you love.

What are the torches of the world to you,
The words that comfort men and calm their fears?
What are the stars with their strange harmonies,
Or fate that shadows all, or death that jeers?
There must be laughter in the song you love
And at the end there must be tears.

When I have come to that green place we know
Where cedars stand that have no faith in spring,
Where through the utter peace of afternoon
The mocking-birds their heartless raptures fling,
Long after it is dust, one heart there'll be
Restless with words it could not sing.

3. WEARINESS

I sometimes think Thou art my secret love;
But not to-night. . . . To-night I have the need
Of human tenderness; not hovering wings,
But one warm breast where I may lay my head
And close my eyes. For I am tired to-night. . . .
The park was full of lovers,
And such a slender moon looked down on them. . . .
For one kiss of one mouth, free-given, I
Would give—what's left of me to-night
To the last dream!
Art Thou a jealous god?
Dost think to force by loneliness

Unwilling love to Thee?
Beware, beware! The winds of madness blow
Strong, strong on nights like these! . . .
Thou dost deny me what's of life most sweet,
The bending head and lovely eyes of love—
Then give, beseech Thee, give me sleep.

4. IN THE NIGHT

Drifting, groping
For delight;
Longing, hoping
All the night.
Perfume of
Blossomed hair—
Where is love?
Ah, no, not there! . . .
Not there.

Turning, turning,
Sleepless-eyed,
Something burning
At my side—
Winds that sweep
Poppied hair,
Where is sleep?
Ah, no, not there! . . .
Not there?

5. HOME

I have a need of silence and of stars:
Too much is said too loudly; I am dazed.

The silken sound of whirled infinity
Is lost in voices shouting to be heard.
I once knew men as earnest and less shrill.
An undermeaning that I caught I miss
Among these ears that hear all sounds save silence,
These eyes that see so much but not the sky,
These minds that gain all knowledge but no calm.
If suddenly the desperate music ceased,
Could they return to life? or would they stand
In dancers' attitudes, puzzled, polite,
And striking vaguely hand on tired hand
For an encore, to fill the ghastly pause?
I do not know. Some rhythm there may be
I cannot hear. But I—oh, I must go
Back where the breakers of deep sunlight roll
Across flat fields that love and touch the sky;
Back to the more of earth, the less of man,
Where there is still a plain simplicity,
And friendship, poor in everything but love,
And faith, unwise, unquestioned, but a star.
Soon now the peace of summer will be there
With cloudy fire of myrtles in full bloom;
And, when the marvelous wide evenings come,
Across the molten river one can see
The misty willow-green of Arcady.
And then—the summer stars . . . I will go home.

THE WANDERER

I have grown weary of the open sea,
The chartless ways, the storms, the loneliness,
The coast that topples, tall and shelterless—
Weary of faring where all things are free!

Yet once the open sea was all romance,
Purple and olive-stained and golden-scaled;
And every breeze from some adventure hailed,
And shoals were silver for the moon to dance.

The cliffs were only tall to keep untrod
The kingdom of the fay hung high in air,
And every storm was but Poseidon's dare,
And brave it was to battle with a god.

Ah, blithe it was when the mad night was done
And day with flying hair woke wild and white,
To see the salty sail loom in the light
And know one battle more was bravely won.

Then these were magic seas that ever rang
With melodies, now wild, now sweet, now glad;
At dusk the drifting choirs unseen were sad
And in the lulls of night the sirens sang.

They sing no more; the colors now are grey;
The cliffs defend not fairyland, but home;
And when th' impenitent, hoar sea has clomb
The clouds, I have no heart to sing or pray.

Oh, I am weary of the open sea,
Vigils and storms and watches without name,
The ache of long resistance without aim,
The fetters of the fetterless and free.

There is some haven that no tempest mars,
Some brown-hilled harbor, hushed and clear and deep,
Where tired evening may sit down and weep,
And, waking, find not water there but stars.

There would I creep at last ere day is done,
With ashen sail dropped down and cordage white;
There rest secure, there find before the night
A little hour of peace, a little sun!

THE MAN IN WHITE

(*Ambulance drivers from the Front tell that to the grievously wounded, alone on the battlefield, the hallucination often comes of a man in white who comforts them.*)

"Soldier, knowest thou the land
The land that's home to thee?"
"Stranger, with the voice not strange,
Why do you lean to me,
A wounded man, and put a word
That mocks my memory?"

"Soldier, I am from that land,
The land that's home to thee."
"O stranger with the gentle hands,
Now let your pity be.
You have no word what land is mine,
Your closed eyes cannot see
As mine, as mine, the land of lands,
The land where I would be."

"I see a field of apple trees
That top a furrowed hill,
A little house, a little room,
A flowered window sill.
A woman with a face like thine,
But eyes more sweet and still,
Who prays across the gathered dusk
To guard her child from ill."

"My God, my God, I fear to look
Lest there be no man by!
If this be but a fever dream
O let me sleep and die
And never know a blessed ghost
From home had heard my cry."

"See me, touch me, let thy head
On my bosom weigh.
This, the kiss your mother sent,
That on your lips I lay."
"Yes—it is hers—no other drives
The awful pain away—
I think—that I could fall asleep—
If you—would only—stay."

"Rest thee, rest thee on my breast,
Let the deep sleep come.
Rest thee, rest thee, soldier lad,
Time is past to roam.
Waking, I shall still be near,
And we shall be at home."

THE WOOD

There was a knight once rode from out the sun
Into a twilight wood, forever still.
It was a place for blue-eyed knights to shun,
For such are liefer to enchantments ill.
Deep in the wood he rode with head bent low . . .
There was no sound save tired leaves that fell.
His lance hung listless from his saddle bow;
Pale was his armor; pale his mouth as well.
The old adventures and the knightly bouts
Seemed faint and far as shapes in fever seen.
Because his dreams had died, but not his doubts,
His eyes were grey that had been blue, I ween.

But whether he that haunted wood passed through,
Or came unto the marsh, I never knew.

IN THE STORM

The shining moments are so far between!
From their clear crests we see the dawn unfurled
In films of opal on the dew-drenched world—
Life, life, dædal, harmonious, serene!
Then darkness. For that aërial wide scene,
Tempests down mountain by-paths madly hurled;
This way and that our tortured souls are whirled,
Blinded, aghast, beneath the lightning's green.
The peaks are moments; lifelong lasts the dark.
Yet, soul, be strong! Thou hast beheld the sun,
Hast known that life is wisdom and is one.
Stanch thy despair! The cloud-rack thou dost mark
May hide a crest whereto thy wanderings bend.
And this, too, ends. There is a certain end.

MR. W. H. TO THE POET

(*Thanking him for a copy of "The Tempest."*)

My thanks, dear friend, as always! But, I fear
No art—not Prospero's—can speak to me
As those swift words you breathed first in my ear.
They were your heart; this but your wizardry.
We have lived much, won much, and now are old.
Strange, is it not, when I call in review
My life's achievements, dross and drab and gold,
There's nothing shines but took its light from you?
And yet, as I reread our book to-night,
And trembled almost at some old-loved line,
I wondered if the world, so prone to slight,
Would some day slur your stainless name with mine,
Not knowing there is ice in heavenly flame,
And Friendship is Love's canonizèd name.

NOVEMBER

How has November won
More loveliness
With opal mist and sun
Than spring can boast?

The village houses all
Wear aureoles.
Their smoke is pale and tall
As Abel's was.

The winds adoringly
On tiptoe pause,
Nor grudge the branches free
Slow gift of leaves.

And on the air one note
Clear, clear, and sad,
From the unmated throat
Of some lone bird.

O earth, that doth confess
In beauty God,
How calm the happiness,
How close the tears!

PROLOGUE

Whose blood runs gay as summer's,
Whose heart is sure and proud,
Whose days are all newcomers,
Whose nights are dream-endowed,—
Pass on, lest you should hear
Speech neither sweet nor clear.

Whose blood is slowly spilling,
Whose heart has crimson scars,
Whose days have lost their thrilling,
Whose nights have lost their stars—
Pause here and you will find
One of your kith and kind.

TO AN OLD TUNE

You cannot choose but love, lad,
From dawn till twilight dreary;
You cannot choose but love, lad,
Though love grows weary, weary.

For, lad, an if you love not,
You'd best have slept, unwaking;
But, O, an if you love, lad,
Your heart is breaking, breaking.

Though friends and lovers only
Fill life with joyous breath,
Yet friend or lover only
Can make you pray for death.

Throw open wide your heart then,
Love's road-house for a mile!
And if one turns to leave you
Or stab you—smile, lad, smile.

A HUNGER SONG

Some are fed on kingly fare,
Some starve, as fate decrees;
Of those death takes away the soul,
The body takes of these.

I would not have my soul to die;
Too soon corruption comes.
But two deaths I had rather die,
Than live and live on crumbs.

There is a banquet table set
Within a silver gate
Where lads and maidens lightly feast—
Outside the beggars wait.

Oh, starve me, food and drink denied,
Or gorge till soul succumbs,
But I'll not live as beggars do—
Feed me not, Love, on crumbs.

DEFEAT

Though you have struck me to the bloody core,
It is indeed only one scar the more!
And I'll not turn from you as at the other strokes,
Nor say "Good-bye," as other times I said.
The agony still chokes,
And still it seems most restful to be dead.
But I'll not say "Good-bye" nor turn away,
Nor parting lover play. . . .
Leave you? Take everything save all—my heart?
I know the scene too well, too well my part!
Hot tears and bitterness; and I would go,
Go for an hour, a day, a week—
Is bitterness so short called pique?
And in the old, old way, without regret
I would return to you;
And in the old, old way you would forget
That ever I had gone, and let
Some casual tenderness
Be my return's caress;
Or in some vague, absorbed distress,
Lift up your shadow eyes to mine still wet.

LULLABY

Sleep, brown-eyed, sleep.
'Tis but the winds that weep,
Telling from tree to tree
Their ancient misery.
'Tis but the winds that weep.
Sleep. . . . Sleep.
'Tis but the touch of dreams
Upon your mouth that seems
Like groping kisses . . . Sleep!
'Tis but the dreams . . .
And, oh, 'tis but the dew
So bitter tastes to you,
Falling the long night through,
Falling on lips untrue—
The dew, only the dew.

SANCTUARY

Sweep over me, O lovely winds,
That shake the tasseled oak!
The patience of the ancient earth
Turns blossom at your stroke,
The very grievance of the air
Thins out to silver smoke.

Sweep over me, O youthful winds,
And I will lie as dead
Upon the leaves that lived last year,
With new leaves overhead.
Has your beneficence no balm
For hearts grown wearièd?

There's weariness of labor done
That dark and sleep appease;
And fragrant weariness of flesh,
Delightfuller than ease;
But there's a weariness that comes
More wearily than these,

With neither blossoms in its hair,
Nor sleepy sound of rain,
Nor bearing ointments to allay
The heart that's sick with pain.
There is a weariness that comes
And does not go again.

IN APRIL ONCE

O ancient earth that never tires,
O heavens that renew,
O winds that foam and flash and blow
Forever fresh as dew,
There is a wounded thing that lies
Face down, and calls on you.

AUTUMNAL

To-night the tumult of the autumn wind
Rushes between the ragged grey of heaven
And earth's autumnal grey—swift, swift and loud—
Filled with the wings of wild birds southward blown
And with the wings of leaves that only fly
Their red and golden flight when they are dead.
And we who keep unwillingly the earth,
Are caught, are caught up with the birds and the leaves,
Are whirled above the spare, unblossoming fields,
Along the pallid torrents of the air,
Far from the earth we know, past the dead moon,
Beyond the blue-lit, scattered spheres of night
That flicker down the dark like shaken leaves,
On, on, with the rushing wind of autumn,
Out to the stark, last outpost of creation
Where nothingness surges. . . .
From that wan strand where breaks that ebon tide,
Could we behold, were spirit vision ours,
The blowing legions of the homeless dead
In wraithy phosphorus against the void?
A little while, O winds that rush and call,
A little while, O leaves, and we shall know!

A SEA BALLAD

"Is that the sea, is that the sea?
O mother dear, lean close to me.
Just there, outside the window sill,
The creeping tides are never still."
"Lie back, my son, the April breeze
Is dashing sunlight on the trees."

"I hear the sea, I hear the sea;
The breakers keen and call to me!
My father's blood was mixed with brine,
And, oh, my father's blood is mine."
" 'Tis fever makes your eyes so blue
And stains your lips with that hot hue."

"Look, look, a sail upon the sea!"
" 'Tis sunlight on the dogwood tree."
"It tacks! And now it comes straight on!"
"Merciful God, he is my son."
"Mother, I must go down to the sea!"
"Nay, son, my son, stay home with me."

"Look how they beckon, the sheet is spread."
"We are alone and I am afraid."
"They are calling me, calling me, I must go down.
They are sailing away to a strange, lonely town.
Mother, come with me. . . . Mother! . . . 'tis done."
"God without pity! O son, little son!"

AUSTRALIA IN LONDON

Between the battle over
And the battle just begun
They give six days to wander
And take their bit of fun
To the lads whose land lies under
The rays of the rising sun.

No English home is theirs,
They have no English friend—
Australia's uncivilized,
Squatters, you know, no end!
So up they come to London
Their bob a day to spend.

And a lad may spend it in the pubs,
Or girls are cheap as thought—
It's not the warmth of English beer
Or the harlot's kiss that's sought,
But those about to die have need
Of tenderness, though bought.

Between the battle over
And the battle not begun
They walk the streets of London,
Strangers, frowned upon.
Yet their eyes are grey with the light
Of the newly risen sun.

A wind from infinite skies
    Ruffles always their hair,
And the look of the birds of the sun,
    Lonely, disdainful, aware,
Is the look of their mouth and their eyes;
    They are the dreamers who dare.

They bear no arms because they must,
    They wage no conscript's war,
They fight for neither English king,
    Nor tsar nor emperor;
They heard that freedom's cause was struck,
    And freedom is their star.

Sons of the rising sun,
    With swift un-English eyes,
Not fair with white and red,
    But burnt by flaming skies,
And scornful with such youth
    As, boasting, fights and dies!

Along the Strand they swing
    With haversack and gun,
Their broad, brown hats caught up
    One side as if in fun,
And at their tunic's throat
    The sign of the rising sun.

And London furnishes,
    Though pious-eyed, askance,

Her harlots and her pubs
To these whose very glance
Is sunlight, and who march
To-morrow into France.

To these so infinitely young,
So passionate to live,
That they can turn a harlot's kiss
To love, and gladly give
What's left of them to death,
And then have all to give.

Sons of the rising sun,
I, from across the sea,
Drink to your gathered youth
And your gallant chivalry.
And I would to God by your side
We fought, as you, to be free.

December, 1916

IN OUR YARD

Moses, Moses, seeing God
In a bush that burned,
Moses, Moses, hearing God
Advising, unconcerned,

I believe you, for myself
Saw Him plain and heard—
Others saw a myrtle bush
That held a mocking-bird.

A WOOD SONG

My love is a bush in bloom,
    My love is a bird in the air,
My love is an April day,
    And a wind with golden hair.

A melody is my love
    That trembles and glistens and goes,
A forest in bud is my love
    Where hidden laughter flows.

Good-bye, O sweet-lipped maiden,
    O trusted friend, adieu!
My old love is my new love
    And dearer far than you.

THE LITTLE SHEPHERD'S SONG

(13th Century)

The leaves, the little birds, and I,
The fleece clouds and the sweet, sweet sky,
The pages singing as they ride
Down there, down there where the river is wide—
Heigh-ho, what a day! What a lovely day!
Even too lovely to hop and play
With my sheep,
Or sleep
In the sun!

And so I lie in the deep, deep grass
And watch the pages as they pass,
And sing to them as they to me
Till they turn the bend by the poplar tree.
And then—O then, I sing right on
To the leaves and the lambs and myself alone!
For I think there must be
Inside of me
A bird!

ADVENTURE

Who would not love to go
Out where the breakers blow,
Curling and green and slow,
With a rose sail?
Lands there are far away,
Marvelous in the spray,
Turquoise by night, by day
Gold as the grail.
Morning's the time to start
Just with a tipsy heart.
Wisdom a tiny part
Taking, you fail.

TO BUTTERFLY

Do you remember how the twilight stood
And leaned above the river just to see
If still the crocus buds were in her hood
And if her robes were gold or shadowy?
Do you remember how the twilight stood
When we were lovers and the world our wood?

And then, one night, when we could find no word
But silence trembled like a heart—like mine!—
And suddenly that moon-enraptured bird
Awoke and all the darkness turned to wine?
How long ago that was! And how absurd
For us to own a wood that owned a bird!

They tell me there are magic gardens still,
And birds that sleep to wake and dream to sing,
And streams that pause for crocus skies to fill;
But they that told were lovers and 'twas spring.
Yet why the moon to-night's a daffodil
When it is March—— Do you remember still?

AGRICOLÆ

I watch the farmers in their fields
And marvel secretly.
They are so very calm and sure,
They have such dignity.

They know such simple things so well,
Although their learning's small,
They find a steady, brown content
Where some find none at all.

And all their quarrellings with God
Are soon made up again;
They grant forgiveness when He sends
His silver, tardy rain.

Their pleasure is so grave and full
When gathered crops are trim,
You know they think their work was done
In partnership with Him.

Then, why, when there are fields to buy,
And little fields to rent,
Do I still love so foolishly
Wisdom and discontent?

RIOLAMA

(*After reading Hudson's "Green Mansions"*)

There is a land beyond the lands you know,
Circled by silver veils of woven rain
And green, clear sunsets with the moon in tow
And woods and dark savannahs of wild grain.

I have not wandered in the forests there,
I have not watched its willowed waters flow,
I have not breathed its leafy, upland air,
And yet, and yet, it is the land I know.

Its people's speech that my heart echoes so
To you were wild birds singing in their vine,
And other dreams and other loves they know,
But all their dreams and all their loves are mine.

They are my people! I am lost with you
And only guess the ways that I should go;
Forever homesick, baffled, yearning to
My native land that I shall never know.

A BALLAD OF ST. SEBASTIEN

I

Sebastien, Sebastien,
The archer of the King I be.
Strip off thine armor, strong and bright,
And naked stand against yon tree
For target to mine arrows' flight;
This is the King's command to thee.

O Archer, draw thy long grey bow,
Thine arrows loosen, wing by wing;
Naked I stand against the tree;
I am obedient to the King.

II

Sebastien, Sebastien,
I fit an arrow in my bow,
With poisoned laughter it is shod.
O naked knight, with head bent low,
Thus slaves bend down to take the rod—
I doubt if blood so meek can flow!

O marksman pale, with eyes of mist,
Close to my side I heard it sing!
And thou must choose a goodlier shaft
Than laughter levelled at my King.

III

Sebastien, Sebastien,
I choose me seven arrows old,
And never the heart of man they miss;
Two red, one green, two black, one gold,
And one soft-falling like a kiss.
Call up thy spirits, Knight, be bold!

Blood, blood, it flows! and oh, the kiss
Upon my heart of that warm thing!
Yet shoot another sheaf, for still
I am but wounded for my King!

IV

Sebastien, Sebastien,
Behold a barb that takes away
The love of one thou lovest best.
The love it takes it does not slay,
But leaves it in another's breast. . . .
With tears the ancient barb is grey.

Oh, can it be the King ordains
This agony that slays the spring?
But for the years that thou wast loved,
Kneel down, O heart, and bless the King.

V

Sebastien, Sebastien,
Dost thou still turn thy pain to praise?
Wilt thou not die, though crimson-flecked?

Then take the shaft that never strays,
'Tis called "The Death of Self-Respect"—
Its song is laughter, and it slays.

There is no quarry left for death,
And I am dead without death's sting . . .
Take all, take all; Thou gavest all,
O Lord of mine, my Lord the King!

VI

Sebastien, Sebastien,
What is the faith that flows and fills
Thy heart with strength, thine eyes with light
While ruby-red the life-blood spills?
Look up, look up, O dying Knight—
That faith this blunted arrow kills!

And me . . . No archer thou of His!
Back, back! This death, this suffering
Are but thy sport . . . Lift not my head! . . .
O pale-eyed man, art *thou* the King?

THE QUESTION

Is it enough to feel the opal spring
Burst quivering on branch and bush and wing?
To kiss the soft-cheeked air?
To know the world is fair?—
Is it enough?

Is it enough to see man's passionate
Divinity break shimmering on fate?
His soul's devout desire
Flame and go out like fire?—
Is it enough?

Will beauty and nobility descried,
Will anything save touching hands and side
Assuage us to confess
Through life's unhappiness,
It is enough?

EVENING LINES

Ah, dreamy world and liquid-sounding leaves,
Ah, skies that on your bosom bear the dawn
And evening, and recurrent, trembling stars,
Why are we strangers to your certain calm,
Your joy, perennial and effortless?
We strive to understand; our desperate faith
Leans listening against the universe
To catch some meaning, some deep harmony
To still the throbbing silence that we hear.
In vain, in vain! There is an inner music,
But 'tis no serenade to please our ears.
When the last human heart is underground,
Great sunsets still will aureole the west,
No whit less gorgeous for that they're unseen.
And this divine frail moon will not delay
Because her lovers' lips are yet more pale
Than when her yearning parted them. Ah, no—
Not listeners we, but part, ourselves, of some
Mysterious harmony, perhaps heard elsewhere.

FROM A SOLDIER'S NOTEBOOK

A VOLUNTEER'S GRAVE

Not long ago it was a bird
In vacant, lilac skies
Could stir the sleep that hardly closed
His laughing eyes.

But here, where murdering thunders rock
The lintels of the dawn,
Although they shake his shallow bed
Yet he sleeps on.

Another spring with rain and leaf
And buds serenely red,
And this wise field will have forgot
Its youthful dead.

And, wise of heart, who loved him best
Will be forgetting, too,
Even before their own beds gleam
With heedless dew.

Yet what have all the centuries
Of purpose, pain, and joy
Bequeathed us lovelier to recall
Than this dead boy!

NIGHT OFF GALLIPOLI

(*Eight Spirit Songs*)

I

A delirious voice:

Sweeter than sleep and the dream of death
To float on the flow of the tempest's breath—
A leaf in the lift of the air's caresses,
A bloom in the sway of the sea's brown tresses,
A bird that the hawk of the storm possesses!
Death, thou art best,
Being rest.

II

Voice of a youthful Turk:

If only up the straits the tempest flew,
Up the blue waters, past the perilous spray
To where the clustered cypresses are blue
Above pale stairs that touch the lisping bay,
I should not care, I should not greatly care—
If only up the straits the tempest flew!

If only up the straits my spirit flew
As once it flew when sails were all my wings,
To that deep garden where the moon is blue
And sea-sounds soften close-lipped whisperings,
I should not care, I should not greatly care—
If only up the straits my spirit flew!

Death could not keep me from the arms of you,
But I should die again upon your mouth
While all the swaying garden changed from blue
To red, and softer grew your bosom's south.
I should not care, I should not greatly care,
Dying again upon the mouth of you!

III

An English voice:

I knew the stars would come,
Brighter than English stars
And purer than the stars of battle!
They shine on Thessaly,
On the pale Argive plain,
And leave a lovelier light on Lesbos.

O Grecian stars, how oft
At home, in the grey sea,
I longed to know the lands ye guard!
Now death, propitious, speeds
My soul on those dark tides
Whose foam ye lit when Helen fled.

Blow, wind of Tauris, blow!
This is the sea that heard
The Lesbian's cry, and further south
The shining song of him
Whose heart was washed with tears.
O southward blowing wind, blow on!

IV

Voice of a Breton Fisherman:

Douarnenez! Douarnenez!
O little town on the fishing bay!
O southern sea, too soft, too blue,
Let me thro'! let me thro'!
Till the green and the cold of the western sea
And the lonely cliffs of Brittany
And home, my home, Douarnenez,
Break on mine eyes with the breaking day!

V

Voice of an English poet:

South! . . . These stars I know! . . . And south is Greece!
O Death, one gentleness I pray—
Let me find rest on that divine, sweet shore,
And have for spirit-home some strip of Hellas!
Some mountain cove in hearing of the sea,
Some fabled fold, perhaps, of Helicon,
Trod once by silver feet, now silvery
With heliotrope and sprinkled sheep,
There bide in quiet death's prepared event. . . .
After the snows, when April nights grow warm
And lilies of the moon blanch field and crag,
When tenderly the wind blows down from Thessaly,
And dews are deep, and down the mountains glide
On feather feet the drifting dreams

Whose land is not the land of sleep—
Ah, then, perhaps, the spirit that incited so
My heart to song in earthlier days,
Balked of the dear delight of utterance,
Muted beyond all hope of speech,
May tinge with sharper longing the lament
Of that sole bird that sings unto his heart,
Or deeplier dye the coral-mouthèd blooms
That hide but do not hush the river's brink. . . .

VI

A Canadian voice:

God, God, how well they meant,
How utterly they failed!
Why wilt Thou give us strength,
Courage and fortitude,
But leave us without reason, impotent?

They poured us out like water.
The thirsty ground still drank,
And still they poured; until
The hills above the sea
Were red as sunset, but unconquered still.

Such blood, so young, so proud!
No Homer will rise up
To sing their deeds; for deeds
There be too great for song,
And heroes must be few to stir the rage.

All Canada was Ajax,
And India, to a man,

As fierce as Hector was!
The young isles of the south
Blazed like Achilles when they killed his friend.

And all for what? For nothing!
We, who in the west
Had crossed perhaps the Rhine,
Have crossed but Lethe here,
And won but failure for our only fame.

There never was a cause
So worthy to be won!
If France and England die,
Freedom and faith are dead—
Give them, O God, not heroes' hearts, but brains!

VII

Voice of a French poet:

And so the songs must go unsung,
The dreams be only dreams. . . .
But I have died for France! There is no fate
So worthy them her august blood endues. . . .
When all is said, what is the poet's life?
The vulture's ebb between sky ecstasy
And carrion of earth! Raptured, superb,
He wheels against the sun, then falls
And battens on the refuse beasts refuse!
Somewhere i' the compound, rainbow stuff
And sunset-cloud and green-winged spray,
There creeps the taint, the particle of earth,
That marks it with the black of madness, sin,
or quirk.

Only the great are phœnix of the sun,
Unfathered save of flame and dizzy light;
They only keep, unpausingly and pure,
The blue enfeoffments of their gorgeous sire.

Say I had lived; which height had I attained?
The vulture's? Or the phœnix' flaming zone?
Death makes all questions foolish now. . . .
Yet in my soul I know there was a thing in me
Of most immortal lineaments,
Whose speech was beauty and whose thought was prayer! . . .
But even so, a year, a hundred years,
A thousand—the loveliest words of men
Are leaves with but a redder tint to time.
The singers pass; the song endures: I die;
But somewhere will gush up the crimson fire
That lit my heart to songs I might not sing.
And there was France to die for! A splendor's there
Beyond the dimming of eternity!
Who would be singer now, not soldier, who
Would live for Fame when he could die for France,
Fame, too, I must believe, will scorn as bastard. . . .
She had no need of songs who asked my life.
Songs! Here was a deed to do
More gracious and more splendid than all songs!
And I have done that deed;
And I am well content.

VIII

A host of spirits:

We fought and saw the stars and fell.
To fight and win were better;
To fight and fall is well.

Perhaps a god directed so
We should be overcome;
Perhaps; we may not know.

We knew the trumpet call of life;
We knew the call was not
To victory, but strife.

And if, indeed, no god there be
That hung the stars we saw,
Yet we who fought, yea, we

Who died, out on the bloody sod,
We know beyond all doubt
In us there was a god.

Strong Spirit, who hast wrought
A fighting world for men,
Take us; like men we fought.

SWALLOWS

(*Paris—May, 1918*)

Over the roofs the swallows fly
In the quiet evening air.
Though just above the homes of men,
They have not any care.

The women on the balconies,
That watch and seem to see,
The birds could touch them with their wings,
They stand so quietly.

So quietly! But if the birds
Had cognizance of pain,
Could hear the prayers that quiver past,
They would not fly again.

POPPY FIELDS

You say this poppy blooms so red
Because its roots were daily fed
On last year's cold and festering dead?

Such is the blessèd way of earth;
Oblivious, intent on mirth,
To turn rank death to gorgeous birth!

Even this brutal agony,
So hideous, so foul, will be
Romance to others, presently.

And would it not be proud romance
Falling in some obscure advance
To rise, a poppy field of France?

ON LEAVE

I have reached a green, green island
In a sea without a shore.
Behind the grey waves crumble,
And I will not look before.

Here there are music and leisure
And the touch of a tender hand;
Here is my golden river
And the warm, wide river land.

I am safe to-day, if never;
They have given me love and rest;
Sailing the sea of sorrow
I have touched at the isle of the blest.

TO C. P.

Her spirit's loveliness was such
Her body's loveliness I could not see;
I only know her eyes were heavenly blue
That now are grey with tears for me.

IN FRANCE

Let not a foreign earth weigh down my head,
Nor mingle with the dust that was my heart!
Lay me among my own when I am dead,
In my own land, eternally a part
Of all I know and love. I could not sleep
With strangers here, and there is aching need
Of sleep after much weariness, and deep
Were mine at home. It is a place, indeed,
For long, untroubled sleep. All summer there
The pale somnambulists of heaven pass
Immense and silver through the turquoise air,
Trailing their purple garments on the grass.

Though friendless, childless, honorless I come,
They will know I am theirs; they will make room.

THE SOLDIER GENERATION

We are the sons of disaster,
Deserted by gods that are named,
Thrust in a world with no master,
Our altars prepared but unclaimed;
Wreathed with the blood-purple aster,
Victims, foredoomed, but untamed.

Behold, without faith we were fashioned,
Bereft the assuaging of lies;
Thirsty for dreams we have passioned,
Yet more for truth that denies;
Aware that no powers compassioned,
We have turned to our hearts and grown wise.

Leisure we loved and laughter;
Our portion is labor and pain;
For home we are given a rafter
Of wind and a lintel of rain,
And all that our hearts followed after
Is taken and naught doth remain.

Yet never a new generation
But shall live by the battle we fight,
And prosper of our immolation
And reap of our anguish, delight.
Accepting the great abnegation
We are fathers, not children, of light.

Bruised with the scourges of sorrow,
Broke with the terrible rod,
Bidden for respite to borrow
A poppy-red swathe of the sod,
Yet this is our hope—that to-morrow
Will yield of our strivings, God.

AFTER ANY BATTLE

Voice of Earth:

These are my children's voices! Born
Not of the sun, who, for a heritage,
Giveth a light wherewith to see, a fire
To burn away the dross gat from my loins;
Nor of the moon whose sons are mad with beauty;
Nor of the stars, for they, thro' change and drift,
Behold the steadfast heavens and the pole.
But these are mine, unfathered and unclaimed,
Sustained by shining from no sun nor moon
Nor fixed nor vagrant star.
Yea, they are mine—
Dust that is black with my ferocious blood
And brackish with my tears.
Their days are short at best, and they return
With shuddering to my bosom's dark, yet now
They rob each other of the little years their due,
And choke the houses of the whimpering dead!
And why? O why?
Another's folly wrought this holocaust,
Calling it falsely by a sacred name,
Turning the shambles to an altar stone,
And butchery to sacrifice!

THE SQUIRE

I have sung me a stave, a stave or two,
I have drunk me a stoop of wine,
I have roystered across a world that was dew
And a sea that was sunlight and brine.

And now I'll go down where the need is not
Of a singing heart, but a sword;
I'll fight where the dead men welter and rot
With the hard-pressed hosts of the Lord.

And should I come back again, 'twill be
With accolade and spurs,
And many a tale of chivalry,
And the deeds of warriors.

And should I not, O break for me
No buds nor funeral boughs—
I go with the noblest company
That ever death did house.

FOR THEM THAT DIED IN BATTLE

(*1914-1918*)

How blossomy must be the halls of Death
Against the coming of the newly dead!
How sweet with woven garlands gatherèd
From pastures where the pacing stars take breath!
And with what tender haste, each with his wreath
Of welcome, must the elder dead return
To greet about the doors with dear concern
These much-loved, proud-eyed farers from beneath.
For these that come, come not forspent with years,
Nor bent with long despair, nor weak with tears,
They mount superbly thro' the gold-flecked air,
The light of immolation in their eyes,
The green of youth eternal in their hair,
And Honor's music on them like sunrise.

THE FARM AGAIN

(*To the 37th Division*)

The dreamy rain comes down,
And cotton's in the grass.
The farmers all complain—
But I watch armies pass. . . .

The ones that did not come
From Ivoiry again
Are marching down the road
And whistling in the rain.

The forty-two I saw
In Olsene, prone and pale,
With packs and helmets on
Pass by me, young and hale.

I hear their laughter plain—
Some blasphemous, quaint jest
That livens up their step
More than an hour's rest.

They talk of Montfaucon,
Of Thielt and Chryshautem;
My cotton rows, it seems,
Are turnip fields to them.

It's hard to stay indoors
With soldiers marching by.
And if you've hiked and fought
It's hard until you die.

. . . . .

Dim Flanders rain comes down,
The cotton's in the grass;
But I watch wistfully
Gay phantom armies pass.

AN EPISTLE FROM CORINTH

Paul of Tarsus, I have enquired of Jesus
And meditated much and read your words
Directed to the wise Corinthians
Of whom am I. There is much beauty in
His life and therefore comfort, and there is beauty
In that unreasoning rush of eloquence
Of yours, so much it almost caught me up
And made me Christian. Such is the power of faith
Ablaze in one we know to be no fool!
I watched you as you preached that day in Athens:
You are no fool, nor saint, but one I judge
Of intellect that somehow has caught fire
And so misleads when it is shiningest.

I had hoped to find in you or in your Christ
Some answer to the questions that unanswered
Slay our wills . . . There's so much lost!
Parnassus there across the turquoise gulf
Still holds its rose and snow to the blown sun,
But no young Phoebus guides the golden car,
Nor will the years' returning loveliness
For all its perfumed broidure bring again
The Twelve to the bright mountain place they loved.
The gods of Greece are dead, forever dead:
The Romans substitute idolatry;
And there's such peace and idleness in the world
As gives the thinking powers full scope to soar,
And soar they do, but in red-beakèd bands

That darken all the sun and nurture find
On the Promethean bare heart of man.
How strange to see the labor of the world
Straining for plenteous food and drink and warmth,
For ease and freedom and the right to choose,
But winning these win only doubt and anguish!
Is this accessory to our coming here?
Is there no answer waiting to be found?

I judge the struggle for perfection if
Engaged in long enough, say thro the years
Of gorgeous youth, the ashen middle years,
Will end in calm, a kind of stale content—
No gush and quiver in the leafless tree!
But that's the body's dying, not the fight's
Reward, old age not victory!
Yet who, save those few souls and stern
That passionate unto perfection walk
The alien earth scornful and sure,
Would pledge themselves to life-long virtue
Except exchanged for happiness, here
Or hereafter? Who, I ask and hear no answer.
'Twas for the few that Socrates had thought:
Your Jesus had profounder bitterness
And, wroth against a universal woe,
Conceived a universal anodyne—
Heaven, his father's Kingdom, Paradise.

Hence his success with slave and sick and poor—
The solace for their skimped experience
They find in dreams of restitution and
A promised land, whose king will dower and

Reward their loyalty with bliss eternal.
This promise of his kingdom and the immense
Illusion that he had, shared still by you,
Of coming once again and shortly to
Select mankind for punishment or saving
Are above all the concepts that ensure
His following, which when the fact disproves
Will fall away and be forgotten till
His name will vanish and the careless years
Hide with their passing sandals' dust his dream.

Yet in this Jesus I detect always
Something more true and sound and saving than
The postulates of his philosophy.
Compared with Socrates his intellect
Lacked wonder, self-delight, sufficiency.
The Athenian in his noblest eloquence
Assumed himself a son of God, yet him
I understood, somehow: it seemed at least
Poetically true. But when your Jew
Speaks of his father, all that I never learned
Is near, I cannot think, but I can feel,
And 'spite of me, I have the sense of wisdom
Simpler and fruitfuller and wiser than
All wisdom we had hardly learned before,
That turns irrelevant and pitiful
Much we had frayed and tattered our poor souls
In guessing. Yet when I turn to you for counsel—
And who of his untutored band but you
Is qualified in wide and leisured learning
To parley equal-minded with a Greek?—

I find a blur of words, a wall of thought,
That more completely hide the god I sense
Than the fantastic patter of his humble
Ignorant worshipers . . . Paul, Paul, I'd give
My Greek inheritance, my wealth and youth,
To speak one evening with that Christ you love
And never saw and cannot understand!

But he is dead and you alone are left,
Irascible and vehement and sure,
For me to turn to with the bleak bad question—
Do we then die? Or shall we be raised up? . . .
There is the hope always of other life,
After this choking room a width of air,
A star perhaps after this sallow earth,
After this place of prayer, a place of deeds.
No man but in his heart's locked privacy
Dares hope this muffled transiency we hate
For its most bitter and ignoble failure
Ends not with what our ignorance calls death.
A Christ with promise of eternity
And proof could Christianize a hundred hundred
worlds!
There are such glimpses of the never-seen,
Such breathings from the outer infinite,
The possible hath such nobility
As makes us suppliants for further chance—
Not repetition, but more scope, O Powers!

Yet better purposeless mortality
Than this mad answer you proclaim to us.
We shall rise up, you say: so far well said.

This essence that disquieteth itself
With less than truth, that will not tolerate
The fare whereon 'tis fed, but sickens so
For immortalities that it doth shape
Of its own yearning—piteously methinks—
Gods and a dwelling place of distant stars,
This surely hath a strength beyond mere days!
But then you add, with equal certainty,
"There's too a resurrection of the flesh."
This is your creed and final comfort, Jew,
That these our gyves and chains are never slipped,
That this captivity we thought a term
Carks to eternity, do what we will!
The impediments to every high resolve,
The traitors to our nascent deity,
The perfumed, warm, corporeal parts of us
That drug to sleep or death the impetuous will,
These are partakers of such after-life
As our fierce souls may grievously attain!
Tarsus, I'll not accept eternal life
Hampered and foiled by this vile thing of flesh!
There is no fire can burn it pure, no rain
Can wash it clean, no death can scourge it slave!
The spirit that is holier than light
Its touch will stain, its vesture will pollute!

You cannot understand, you are a Jew!
Your pores, unsentient, have never drunk
The perfume of a bush that's red by dawn,
And were you here upon this roof tonight
With Corinth at your feet, you'd never know

It was a night of summer, never feel
The straining on the slender leash of will
At all the murmurs and warm silences.
There's a girl's laugh . . . and footsteps loitering.
You'd never guess why they are slow, nor hear
The half-words breathed, nor smile to find yourself
Wondering if the kiss were mouth or throat. . . .
Perfumes! . . .
The night-wind wakes but to caress,
And kissing sleeps . . . the lover's way. . . .
Gods, gods! This fool would have the harlots' mouth
Immortal as the soul of Socrates!
Forgive me, follower of Jesus. I
Am Greek, all Greek; I know the loveliness
Of flesh and its sweet snare, and I am hurt
At finding nothing where I sought for much.
O Paul, had you been more as other men
Your wisdom had been wiser! Christ, perhaps—
But I was born too late and so miss all.
I see no aim nor end. And yet myself
Hopeless of aught of profit from the fight
Fight on. . . . Perhaps there's something truer than
The truth we can deduce. . . . And after all
Our best is but a turning toward the stars,
An upward gaze. . . .